

Meeandah Mobilisation Camp – 1899



OUR SOLDIERS IN CAMP AT MEEANDAH, near Brisbane.

Queensland and the South African War

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1 SUMMARY

This summary briefly sets out the methodology and major findings of the study.

1.1 Introduction

Members of the Queensland Living History Federation (Inc) initiated this study, with funding from a Brisbane City Council Local History Grant. Its purpose is to establish the location, and detail the significance (including archaeological), of the place used for training the military forces of Queensland, prior to their dispatch to South Africa during the period of the South African War of 1899-1902.

The study has been prepared using the methodology and terminology as generally outlined the Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance. (The Burra Charter).

1.2 Understanding the Place

The study attempts to reach as thorough an understanding of the place as possible, based on research into historical documents and investigation of the site. It also examines the site for its potential to yield valuable archaeological evidence of its use during the war of 1899-1902.

1.3 Cultural Significance

A general discussion on the concept of cultural significance provides an introduction to this important chapter.

The information gained from the study has been analysed and assessed against recognised criteria. The cultural significance of the site resulting from this assessment has been expressed as statements of significance.

The significance of the place may be summarised as follows:

- Queensland's involvement in the South African War was a major event in the colony's history. The Queensland Government established a mobilisation and training encampment at Meeandah prior to the dispatch of the first local military forces ever to be sent overseas on Active Service.

1.4 Recommendations

The major recommendations of the study may be summarised as follows:

- That the site of the Meeandah mobilisation camp be nominated for listing on the Brisbane City Council's City Plan 2000 Heritage Register, and on the Queensland Heritage Register, for its potential to provide archaeological evidence of its use during October 1899 as a mobilisation camp for troops departing for the South African War.

- That any redevelopment of the site be subject to an archaeological investigation, and salvage dig if necessary.
- That the sites of both the Meeandah and Pinkenba Encampments be marked in some manner to record the activities that took place there in 1899-1900.

The Meeandah Camp site is significant as:

- The mobilisation camp has the potential to provide evidence of the material culture of Queensland's military in the late 19th century/early 20th century.
- The deployment of Queensland's mounted infantry (the forerunners of the Light Horse) in the South African War, contributed to the fighting reputation of the Australian soldier, a concept which reached its epitome during World War I, and became an integral part in developing an Australian cultural identity.
- The Meeandah camp site has a special association with the history of the Queensland Defence Force and with the Commonwealth Military Forces.
- It also has a special association with the life and work of Robert Dickson, Premier of Queensland, with soldiers Percy Ricardo, Harry Chauvel and Cyril Bridges, and many other participants in this event.

The Pinkenba Camp site:

- This site has limited significance due to the brevity of its use as a campsite and its subsequent abandonment as a result of inundation. While some of the site is now vacant, it saw extensive use as rail-yards during both world wars, continuing at least to the 1980s. Another portion of the site now rests beneath major storage facilities associated with the wharf.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Members of the Queensland Living History Federation (Inc) initiated this study, with funding from a Brisbane City Council Local History Grant. This study attempts to document the social history and heritage significance of the Meeandah military training area. The area, which was known to be located near the deep water wharves at Pinkenba, was the place at which a temporary encampment was established to train volunteer troops before their dispatch to the war in South Africa during the period 1899-1902. This era is also closely associated with the popular patriotic mood of Federation, and thus has considerable significance in the social and military history of Brisbane.

In acknowledgment of the likely significance of the site the study project determined to establish the social history of the site, its exact location, and to determine the site's archaeological potential.

2.2 The Sites

Prior to the work conducted by this study, the actual site of the training camp was not known, though a general area within the Meeandah locality was deemed likely.

The study has revealed that there were in fact four different encampments sites used to facilitate the training and dispatch of Queensland troops to the South African War. The first two sites form the main subjects of the study.

2.3 The Study Team

This Study was undertaken by Dr Brian Sinclair and Brian Rough. The document was produced in 2003 and reformatted in 2016.

2.4 Methodology and Terminology

The investigation has generally followed the methodology outlined in J S Kerr's 'The Conservation Plan'. The report acknowledges the principles and in general adopts the terminology laid down in The Australia ICOMOS Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance (The Burra Charter) and its accompanying guidelines, Cultural Significance and Conservation Policy.

Two kinds of investigation were employed, viz: documentary research and site investigation.

The sources consulted are referenced in the text and noted in the bibliography.

2.5 Limitations

The main perceived limitation in this report is that rather than there having been only one site as had been generally surmised prior to investigation, a number of sites were found to have been used for varying lengths of time. The study of all four of sites was outside the prepared scope of the study, and could provide subjects for future investigation.

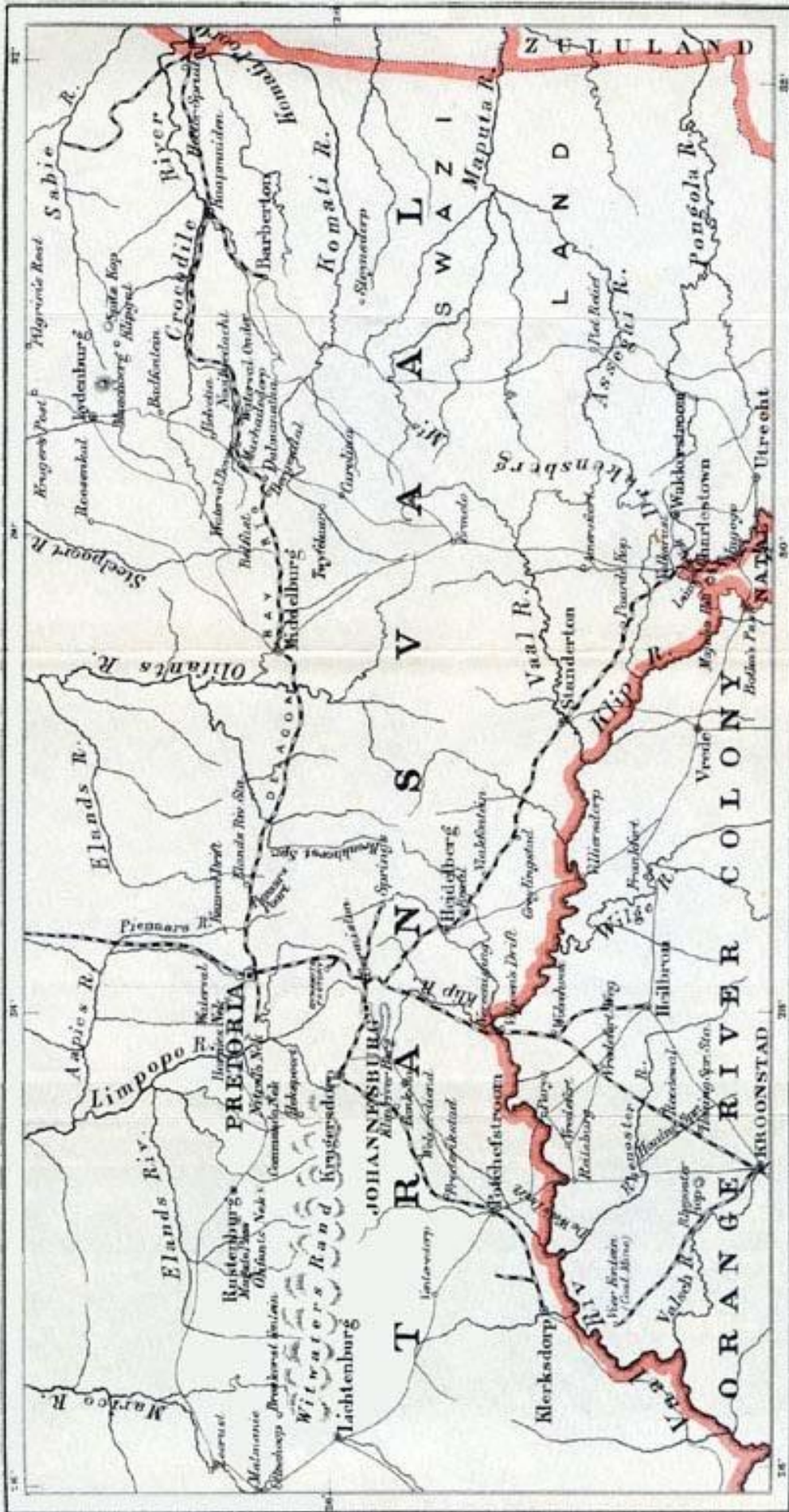
Access to the Meeandah site has not been readily available due to its use as an operating storage yard and business.

2.6 Acknowledgments

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Michael Quinn
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SOUTHERN TRANSVAAL



Scale of Miles
0 10 20 30 40 50

London: South Africa & Co.

3 UNDERSTANDING THE PLACE

3.1 The Historical Context

3.1.1 The origins of the 2nd Boer War

Although the British had seized the Cape Colony on the southern tip of Africa from the French during the 1790s, they withdrew some years later. The Dutch then claimed the colony and introduced settlers, but as the Dutch were allies of Napoleon, the British again took the colony by force in 1806.

As British colonists trickled into the Cape Colony and British law was imposed, the Dutch farmers or Boers ('boer' meaning 'farmer' in the Dutch language) became increasingly discontented. Eventually, the most dissatisfied of the Boers left Cape Colony and crossed the Orange River to found Natal, which was later assimilated as a British colony. The "Great Trek" out of Cape Colony highlighted Boer independence. Later they trekked on across the Vaal River to found the Orange Free State and the Transvaal.

After many short battles with the Boers, the British Government formally recognised the independence of Transvaal and Orange Free State in 1852. In 1877 Britain announced the annexation of Transvaal, and the Boer states surrendered much of their independence in exchange for British protection during the Zulu wars. Regaining that independence was difficult, and ultimately the Boers took to arms in 1880 in what became known as the 1st Boer War. They defeated a small British force at Majuba Hill, and rather than continue the fight sued for a treaty, which was granted in 1881. Britain again formally recognised the independence of Transvaal and Orange Free State.

The discovery of gold in the Transvaal made had a major impact on that state, as thousands of British miners and settlers, known locally as Uitlanders (Outlanders or foreigners) flocked into the country. By the 1890s non-Boers made up $\frac{3}{4}$ of the European population and allegedly contributed 90% of the state's revenue, but were unable to vote or have parliamentary representation. Whether this political disenfranchisement was felt so dearly by the mainly British Transvaal Uitlanders, as was later made out, is still argued by historians. Nevertheless, in the propaganda war that emerged prior to the 2nd Boer War of 1899, it was a major item of contention.

There are also claims that the British always had their eye on the mineral rights of Transvaal. Whether the eye was that of the British Government or British investors and mining magnates is also much debated. Gold and diamond mining were promising great prosperity to the region. In 1895, Dr. Jameson led 600 men on a raid to prompt an Uitlander rebellion in Johannesburg.² The attack was defeated, but significantly increased tensions over the next few years. Many believed an Anglo-Boer war was inevitable and rising tensions in mid-1899 led to violence. Negotiations between British and Boer representatives achieved little, and many historians speculate on whether the British authorities actually wanted to avert war. During the negotiations the British bolstered their troop numbers, concentrating men on the borders with Orange Free State and Transvaal.

In early October 1899 the Boer government delivered an ultimatum to the British in Cape Colony, requiring all outstanding matters to be negotiated and the removal of troops from the border regions. After two days lapsed without a reply the Boers of Transvaal and Orange Free State formally declared war on Britain on 11th October 1899. The Boers, primarily using mounted infantry forces, attacked swiftly and deeply into British territory. They laid siege to Ladysmith, Mafeking and Kimberley, and inflicted heavy losses on the British Army, the worst coming in December 1899 during a period quickly known as 'Black Week'

That there was considerable public support in Australia for the war is evidenced particularly in the thousands who continued to volunteer for military service in South Africa throughout its duration. There was initial vocal opposition to the war, but it was largely unsuccessful. As Grey has noted *the extreme poles of opinion were occupied by a small but highly vocal minority and their influence with the wider public was exaggerated by them for their own purposes.*¹ Journals such as the *Bulletin* were fiercely opposed to the war, and others fully supported it. At the beginning of the conflict, politician Billy Hughes, later the Australian Prime Minister who attempted to introduce military conscription during World War I, made the statement that the war was ill-advised, ill-judged and immoral. As is often found to be the case however, once the troops were involved in the fighting the debate quietened down. The pragmatist Billy Hughes saw which way public opinion was leaning, and went with it. *Our duty is perfectly clear. So long as we are prepared to accept the protection of Great Britain we must be ready to lend her a hand in the hour of need.*²

The attack on the Boer laager at Sunnyside in January 1900 was the first action in which Australian troops were involved. 200 men of the Queensland Mounted infantry, with Canadian and British troops routed the Boers. Here the first Australian casualties also occurred, and with them came the reputation that Australians could acquit themselves well as soldiers. In Queensland parochialism and patriotism were now well entwined, despite evidence of the dichotomy between what Grey describes as *the relatively insignificant nature of the actions and the overwhelming reactions of many Australians to them.*³

Queensland Mounted Infantry

There's a very well-built fellow, with a
 swinging sort of stride,
 About as handy sort as I have seen.
 A rough and tumble fellow that is born to
 fight and ride
 And he's over there a-fighting for the Queen.
 He's Queensland Mounted Infantry,
 compounded 'orse and foot,
 He'll climb a cliff or gallop down a flat.
 He's Cavalry to travel, but he's Infantry to
 shoot,
 And you'll know him by the feathers in his
 hat.

A.B. "Banjo" Paterson, 1900

The roots of the reputation and mythology of the Australian fighting soldier are easily found in contemporary writings about the Boer War. Influential writers of the time such as Walter Murdoch, Banjo Paterson and even Rudyard Kipling wrote about the Australian colonial soldiers during the war, the latter to popularising them in prose. Modern histories acknowledge these beginnings. *The Boer War marked the birth of an Australian military reputation, one renowned for dash and courage and, in the guise of the bushmen and draft contingents, relying more on natural skills developed in the Australian bush than on those instilled on the parade ground. Paradoxically, while the hardest fighting was undertaken by the first two contingents, which were largely drawn from the part-time militias of the colonies, it was the individualism of the bushman which captured the popular imagination.*⁴

Variations on this theme abound in the written record of Australian involvement in the war. While Australian military action in the Boer War may not have been particularly significant to the outcome of the struggle, it was of particular significance to Australians, and their image of themselves, at a time when the Commonwealth of Australia was being born. Penny notes that *Sentimental contemporaries came to regard the two as part of the same process, the coming-of-age of a member of the imperial family.*⁵

¹ J Grey, Military history of Australia pp56-7

² Quoted in B Penny, The Australian Debate on the Boer War, p529

³ J Grey, p58

⁴ Oxford Companion to Australian Military History, p108

⁵ B Penny, Australia's reactions to the Boer War – a study in Colonial Imperialism, p97

The 'coming of age' analogy was interestingly revived a decade or more later when Australians came under fire at Gallipoli. The fact that it was a repetition appears to have been overlooked, and one might speculate that in the 1st World War, as in the Boer War, it was simply a term applied to give explanation, and to engender a sense of national pride and patriotism.

3.1.2 Colonial Queensland and the 2nd Boer War

The presumed inevitability of a war with the Boers, ensured that Queensland, like the other British colonies, was subject to much of the propaganda that preceded it. Newspapers and journals were the only source of information for the public, and most carried the official British view on what was happening – that is that British subjects were being poorly treated by the Boers.

Joseph Chamberlain, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, was keen to get colonial support and involvement in the conflict that was likely to erupt.

According to Wilcox Chamberlain was quite active in eliciting that support: *On 3 July Chamberlain cabled the governments of Canada, New South Wales and Victoria and suggested they offer formally to commit some troops for a 'military demonstration against the Transvaal'. 'Such an offer spontaneously made,' he added, 'would be welcomed here and might have great effect in South Africa.'* The colonial governments were reluctant to do more than take down the names of intending volunteers for a contingent.⁶



Lieutenant-Colonel Percy Ricardo, QMI

Captain Harry Chauvel, at that time Infantry Staff Officer of the Queensland Defence Force (QDF), and Lieutenant-Colonel Percy Ricardo, Commanding Officer of the Queensland Mounted Infantry, both laid claim to have first given voice to the idea of raising a contingent to be sent to South Africa. They discussed it with the QDF Commandant Major-General Howel Gunter, a British officer nearing the end of his contract with the Queensland Government, who in turn raised it with Premier James Dickson.

Queensland did not have the power to send its military forces overseas, nor in fact did it have the power to move its forces into another colony even in time of war. The colonial government therefore had to rely on members of its militia volunteering for active service overseas, for which it would then be able to provide logistic support. Presumably based on advice from the military authorities that this would occur, the Premier supported the idea and a cable was sent to the Secretary of State with the offer of a contingent of 250 officers, non-commissioned officers and men of the Mounted Infantry to serve in the event of hostilities. Chamberlain received the cable on the 6th July, and was allegedly surprised by the offer from an unexpected source. Nevertheless, he accepted it anyway in the hope it might shame the larger colonies into a similar action.

On Tuesday 11 July, the Brisbane Courier made the matter public, and within a few days reported that the news had appeared in the London 'Times', which applauded the colony's offer.⁷ Once the Queensland offer had been accepted by the British authorities, and despite the fact that the Queensland Parliament had not yet given its approval, Major-General Gunter and Lieutenant-

⁶ C Wilcox, *Australia's Boer War*, pp18-19

⁷ Brisbane Courier, 14 July 1899

Cable:

The Secretary of State for War and the Commander-in-Chief highly appreciate the signal exhibition of patriotic spirit by the people of Queensland, and desire that the Mounted Infantry offered by Queensland be organised in two companies of 125 men each, armed with .303 rifles or carbines, with their own horses, but rifles or carbines can be supplied if necessary by the Imperial authorities. There should not be more than one captain and three subalterns to each Company, and an officer not higher than a major may command the whole force. The troops are to be disembarked at the point of landing in South Africa, fully equipped at the cost of the Queensland Government. From the date of disembarkation, they are to be treated as an integral portion of the Imperial forces. After that date the Imperial Government will provide pay at Imperial rates, supply rations and ammunition, and defray expenses of transport back to colony, and pay wound pensions and compassionate allowances at Imperial rates. The troops are to embark not later than October 31 to proceed to Capetown.

(Signed) Chamberlain

Source: *Telegraph* 6 Oct. 1899

Colonel Ricardo began to plan for the mobilisation which they considered inevitable. In this way about half the additional equipment required for the contingent was contracted and manufactured before the Parliament had even approved of its despatch and voted funds,⁸ and the contingent was fully equipped and ready to depart within three weeks of its establishment.

Arthur Conan Doyle, writing a war history in 1902, saw the action as proof of the strength of the British Empire, recalling that there *were indications that the colonies appreciated the fact that the contention was no affair of the mother country alone, but that she was upholding the rights of the empire as a whole, and might fairly look to them to support her in any quarrel which might arise from it. As early as July 11, Queensland, the fiery and semitropical, had offered a contingent of mounted infantry with machine guns; New Zealand, Western Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales, and South Australia followed in the order named. Canada, with the strong but more deliberate spirit of the north, was the last to speak, but spoke the more firmly for the delay.*⁹

While the other colonies one by one fell into line, it was not however until after September 1899 and the Melbourne meeting of the military commandants of the six Australian colonies, that Chamberlain was informed just how they intended to commit their forces. The Commandants drew up a proposal for an Australian brigade that would be available should the Imperial authorities require it. Their idea however was not accepted by Chamberlain, who advised he only wanted small units that could be easily integrated into the British forces. With no options open to them, and having already made the offer, the Australian colonial governments could do nothing but accede to the British conditions of service. Major General French, Commandant of the NSW military forces, (and former Commandant of the QDF) is said to have remarked cynically that *our troops will receive excellent practical training in the field at somebody else's expense mainly.*¹⁰

Even before the long-expected war commenced on 11 October 1899, The British Government had accepted the Queensland offer of troops and provided instructions as to its composition, and by when it should depart the colony. The Queensland Government gazetted the formation of the First Contingent on 19 October, and recruiting began immediately.

In all, the six Australian colonies and, after Federation, the Commonwealth of Australia sent 16,423 troops and 16,357 horses to South Africa. Approximately 1000 of these men re-enlisted and returned with a contingent to South Africa. It is estimated that an additional 7000 Australians enlisted independently in British or South African units.¹¹

⁸ AJ Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse*, p14

⁹ In G Barton, *The Story of South Africa*, Vol II

¹⁰ B Penny, *Australia's reaction to the Boer War*, p100

¹¹ RJ Austin, *The Australian Illustrated Encyclopaedia of the Zulu and Boer Wars*, p 15

The Queensland Contingents

The military forces contributed by Queensland, consisted of:

A and B Companies, and Machine Gun Detachment, 1st Queensland Mounted Infantry.

Established on 19 October 1899 and totalled 14 officers and 248 men. They sailed on the *Cornwall*, 1 November 1899 and returned on 17 January 1901. The Contingent was disbanded on 23 January 1901.

No 3 Company, 2nd Queensland Mounted Infantry

Established on 29 December 1899 and consisted of 10 officers and 144 men. The contingent sailed on the *Maori King*, 13 January 1900, and returned to Brisbane on 3rd May 1901. The Contingent was disbanded on 10 May 1901.

No 4 and 5 Companies, 3rd Queensland Mounted Infantry

Established 9 February 1900 and totalled 14 officers and 302 men. They sailed on the *Duke of Portland*, 1 March 1900, returning to Sydney on 7 June 1901. The Contingent was disbanded on 21 June 1901.

No 6, 7 and 8 Companies, 4th Queensland Imperial Bushman

Established 20 April 1900, it consisted of 26 officers and 368 men. It sailed on the *Manchester Port*, 18 May 1900, and returned to Brisbane 5 August 1901. It was disbanded on 10 August 1901.

5th Queensland Imperial Bushman

Established 20 February 1901 and totalled 22 officers and 481 men. The contingent sailed on the *Templemore* on 6 March 1901. It returned to Brisbane on 30 April 1902, and was disbanded on 5 May 1902.

Draft, 5th Queensland Imperial Bushman

1 officer and 25 men sailed on *Chicago*, 10 March 1901, and joined the contingent in South Africa.

6th Queensland Imperial Bushmen

Established 23 March 1901, it consisted of 17 officers and 384 men who sailed on the *Victoria*, 4 April 1901. The contingent returned to Brisbane 30 April 1902 and was disbanded on 5 May 1902.

1st Draft, 6th Queensland Imperial Bushmen

1 officer and 77 men sailed on the *Britannic* from Sydney, 20 August 1901 and joined the 6th QIB in South Africa.

2nd Draft, 6th Queensland Imperial Bushmen

3 officers and 18 men sailed from Sydney on the *Harlech Castle*, 26 September 1901 and joined the 6th QIB in South Africa.

D Company, 1st Battalion, Australian Commonwealth Horse

Established 2 January 1901 and consisting of 7 officers and 116 men. Sailed from Sydney on the *Custodian*, 18 February 1902, and returned to Brisbane on 13 August 1902. The Company was disbanded on 19 August 1902.

Queensland Field Hospital and Bearer Unit, Commonwealth Contingent, Army Medical Corps
Established 2 January 1901, this detail of 16 men sailed on the *Manchester Merchant* from Sydney on 11 February 1902. It returned to Brisbane on 13 August 1902 and was disbanded on 19 August 1902.

D Company, 3rd Battalion, Australian Commonwealth Horse
Consisting of 5 officers and 117 men, this Company sailed on the *Englishman*, 25 March 1902. It returned 13 August 1902 and was disbanded 19 August 1902.

A, B, C, and D Squadrons, 7th Australian Commonwealth Horse
Totalling 23 officers and 467 men, this battalion sailed on the *Custodian*, 19 May 1902. It returned to Brisbane on 2 August 1902 and was disbanded 19 August 1902.

SUMMARY

Queensland volunteers numbered 2913 men, and with them went 3209 horses, 2 machine guns, 51 bicycles and numerous wagons. The commitment of the sparsely populated colony to equip and train this number of men over a two and a half-year period was considerable. The Queensland military authorities had never before attempted anything like it. The story of that preparation is intrinsically linked with the sites on which it occurred, and the aims of this study are to identify and, if possible, encourage their preservation.



"Camp at Meeandah – Early morning in camp"

From a series of photographs taken by the Queensland Stereoscopic Company, Brisbane, 1899.

HELPING THE MOTHER-COUNTRY

Brisbane Courier, 15 July 1899

The offer of Queensland to send a contingent of troops to South Africa, though no necessity for the acceptance of it has yet risen, has been received in a thoroughly appreciative spirit by our brethren in the old land. The prompt and courteous reply of the Secretary of State for the Colonies left no doubt as to the satisfaction felt by the Imperial Government. And now the "Times," speaking with quite as much of authority in the name of the British people, characterises the message from this colony as "a generous and patriotic offer." But there are persons who regard it in a very different light, and as may be learned from a letter which we publish elsewhere over the signature of a "Civilian of Queensland: it is not necessary to go beyond our own doors in order to find them. The writer cannot conceive why a nation with the military resources of Great Britain should have any need for assistance from a small community such as ours. It is true, as he points out, she has hundreds of thousands of disciplined troops, besides those which she maintains in India. It is equally true that any issues which might have to be decided in South Africa, would not be much affected one way or another by the presence or the absence of the handful of men who would represent the largest force which we could conveniently despatch to that quarter. Great Britain, beyond all doubt, will have no great difficulty in dealing with the Boers single-handed if it be necessary to come to blows with them. Yet, however well she were able to assert her power in the event of its being actually set at defiance by the authorities in the Transvaal, it is not very difficult to understand why she should rejoice at such an expression of practical sympathy as has come from this colony, and why, even without extreme need, she might be disposed to avail herself of it. It is not the material assistance which Queensland could afford her that she would be likely to prize. It is the moral effect which would be thereby produced. For Queensland's example would in the contingency which is thus supposed almost certainly be followed all round by "Greater Britain" if the slightest signal were only given by the mother country. It would be an announcement to the whole world that her stalwart children were prepared to stand by her in just quarrel. And certainly the cause which she champions in this instance is one which is essentially just. It especially appeals to Australians, not alone, in being identified with the national honour of the common stock to which they belong, but also from the fact that among the victims of Boer oppression are numbers of men who have gone to South Africa from this country. There is reason, indeed, to believe that these old Australians in South Africa have already been cheered by the accounts of the sympathetic meetings held in Melbourne and Sydney. If no demonstrations of the kind have been witnessed in Queensland, that omission has been well made up for now by the offer of Queensland's Government.

In the note which has been struck with respect to our readiness to stand by the side of Britain should trouble arise in the Transvaal, the feeling of narrow provincialism has at any rate no place. It hints unmistakably of broader ideas. It may be welcomed, indeed, as an advance note of that Australian nation which is now being called into existence, and which assuredly is destined to exercise a most potent influence on the future course of that Empire of which it must form so important a section. Queensland may certainly be considered as fully ripe for a union with her Australian neighbours when she is thus responsive to a sense of duty with regard to her "kin beyond sea." The critics who cavil at such an attitude on her part, it is not too much to say, take but a purblind view of the whole situation. A military authority, interviewed at the beginning of the week by the "Sydney Morning Herald" speaking with reference to the willingness of many trained men in New South Wales to volunteers for service in South Africa, expresses doubts as to the propriety of allowing them to go out of the colony in view of possible need for them in Australia itself. He contemplates a descent on this country as an event which might be brought about as one of the sequels to a war in the Transvaal. He thinks it not unlikely that, if Britain sets herself to the task of coercing the Boers, some other nation may interfere. Of course, there are many things possible, and what this expert pictures may be comprised in the list. From our telegrams yesterday, it will however, have been noticed that the able officer who was formerly at the head of military affairs in this colony, and who now fills a similar

position in New South Wales, has commended Queensland for her action. He “expressed his pleasure at the offer of the Queensland Government to despatch a contingent to the Transvaal having met the approval of the Imperial authorities,” and said that “not only would it help to give the Queensland forces a fillip, but would show unmistakably that the people of even the most distant portion of Australia sympathised with their brethren in South Africa.” Such a view must commend itself to thoughtful minds. Whether or no, according to present appearances, no nation can be imagined as awaiting for any such opportunity as a war in Transvaal might afford for attacking Britain. It should be some nation that would be in a position to encounter her at sea, and no two – or perhaps it may be added, no three – nations as yet would appear to be altogether satisfied that the task would be an easy one. It is curious to remember that the very same objections which are urged now as to the possible despatch of an Australian contingent to Africa were raised with respect to that force which was actually sent from the mother Australian colony to another quarter of Africa some fourteen years ago. The same cry was uttered as to what would be done if the Empire were suddenly to be involved in war with some of the big Powers, and Australia invaded. Yet if such a calamity had happened, it is likely enough that Australia would not have collapsed for want of the few hundred warriors who had been sent to the Soudan. But beyond any question, as was subsequently proved, the idea of sending them there was almost a stroke of genius on the part of the late Mr Dalley, who was at that time Acting premier of New South Wales. His action was jeered at by a crowd of dullards masquerading as wits, but it struck the imagination of the whole British race, and left an impression which has been a lasting one. From that event the now familiar term of greater Britain may be said to have acquired a meaning which it had not previously possessed. Even so in the present instance, as has already been suggested, any idea of material aid which ‘could be associated with the proffer of help to Great Britain from one of her Australian colonies is trifling as compared with its moral influence. That is decidedly of no ordinary kind, and Queensland may be proud of the fact.

THE TRANSVAAL

Brisbane Courier, 18 July 1899

While still hoping for the better, the British Government is evidently preparing for the worst that may happen in the Transvaal. We learned a few days ago that all preparations had been made for the prompt despatch, if necessary, of some thirty thousand British troops to South Africa. If hostilities should break out, the British, it is clear, will have carefully guarded against the mistake of despising their enemy. The experience they learned in that way at Majuba Hill was indeed too dearly purchased to be forgotten now. If once the struggle be begun Britain is not in the least likely to hold her hand till she brings it home at last in unmistakable fashion to the Boers that from armed resistance to her authority they have no chance of success. But though ultimate victory for Britain would be a forgone conclusion, the Boers would be certain to offer so desperate a resistance that in the interests of humanity it were earnestly to be wished, indeed, that matters may never be brought to such a pass. It would mean a terrible effusion of blood, and such consequences to the Boers themselves as would be deplorable. After all, they claim the respect due to a brave people, a people who, if their virtues were not associated with so much racial jealousy and intolerance, would be entirely admirable. The latest accounts as to the attitude of the Transvaal Volksraad leave it somewhat uncertain as to whether that body has determined to make such concessions to the Outlanders as may really avert the prospects of war. The British Government would appear as yet to be in need of some more light on that particular subject. But at any rate the Outlanders themselves would not seem to have felt any sudden access of confidence as to a change in their favour on the part of the Boer authorities. If the proposals offered by the latter be only of a half-and-half kind, as it is hinted that they actually are, their acceptance would at best, it is to be feared, only tide over a temporary difficulty. It would be a crying of peace where there is no peace. Boer arrogance would assert itself again, and probably at a time when there would be a less favourable opportunity for administering a salutary check in that direction. But it is still to be hoped that some satisfactory arrangement may be arrived at which will give a fair prospect of that consummation so devoutly to be wished for with respect to the South

African troubles. Our cablegrams this morning say that the Boers are under no illusions as to the position they will occupy if a contest should take place. They do not expect much assistance from their kinsmen, the Afrikanders. Nearly the whole of the South African Press, it is stated, approves of the course adopted by Sir Alfred Milner in respect of the negotiations with President Kruger. The moral force which is thus being exerted happily may have its effect. If the Boers could only be persuaded that they could gain nothing by open defiance of the British, the whole situation would be changed. A peaceful fusion of the two races would then be certain. It may yet be possible without further bloodshed. Meanwhile the Imperial Government continues its precautionary measures. We hear of the despatch of immense quantities of war material to South Africa, and of the Admiralty having secured transports which can carry large numbers of troops. The offer of our own Government to send a contingent to the Transvaal in case of need, and Mr chamberlain's appreciative recognition of it, brings Queensland in closer touch with the difficulties with which the mother-country has to deal at that end of the Dark Continent.

THE QUEENSLAND CONTINGENT

Pugh's Almanac, 1900

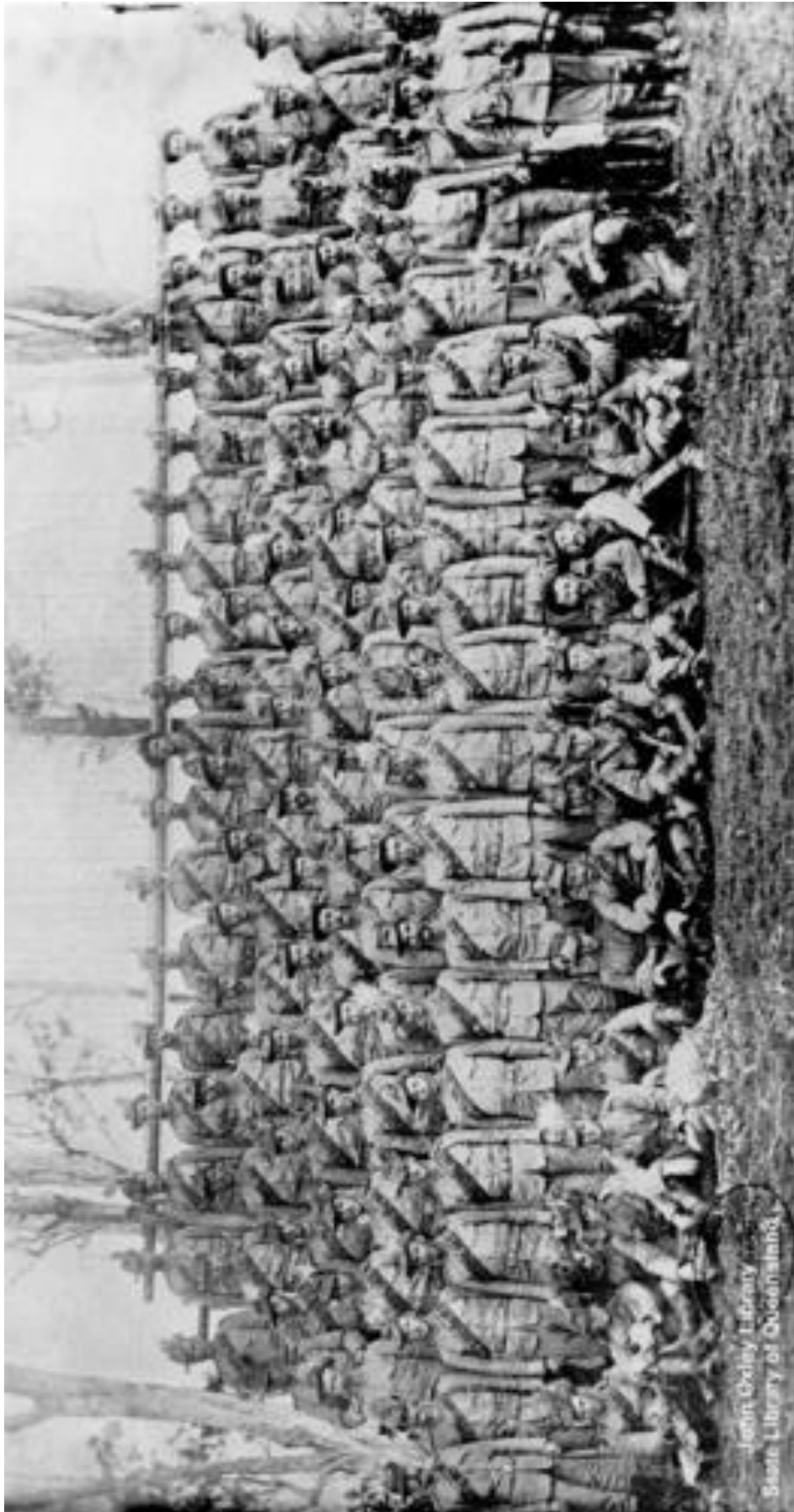
One of the most interesting and exciting events in the history of the colony was the despatch of 250 fully equipped mounted infantry and 300 horses, in charge of Lieut-Colonel Ricardo, by the ss "Cornwall" for the Transvaal, on November 1. On the outbreak of war in South Africa, the Government wired to the Secretary of State offering to send this body of men to assist the British troops against the Boers, and the offer being accepted, arrangements were at once made to carry out the project. On the matter being submitted for the approval of parliament, Mr Dawson, leader of the Labour party, moved an amendment condemnatory of the action of the Government, which was lost by 39 votes to 28, and the original motion was carried on the voices amid cheers. One incident which caused a good deal of discussion arose in connection with the supply of the fodder for the troop horses. It appears Lieut.-Colonel Ricardo, when down south, ordered some 750 tons of this article on his own responsibility. This aroused the indignation of local producers, who, having had to turn large areas of frost-bitten wheat into hay just at that time, were specially anxious for a market. However, the Government to prevent trouble, paid for the imported article. The troops embarked on November 1, in the presence of between 25,000 and 30,000 spectators, amid great enthusiasm, and reached their destination safely on December 11.

On 1st January, 200 of our troops, under Lieutenant-Colonel Ricardo, together with 100 Canadians, had a sharp encounter with the enemy at Sunnyside, near Colenso. The Boers, who were posted on a number of kopjes, were taken by surprise, and completely routed. The Queenslanders captured 40 prisoners and a number of the enemy were killed and wounded. Unfortunately, two of our men were killed and two wounded, one – Lieutenant Adie – seriously. The coolness, courage, and dash of our troops has called forth general admiration, and the colony has been complimented by the Imperial military authorities on their brilliant success.

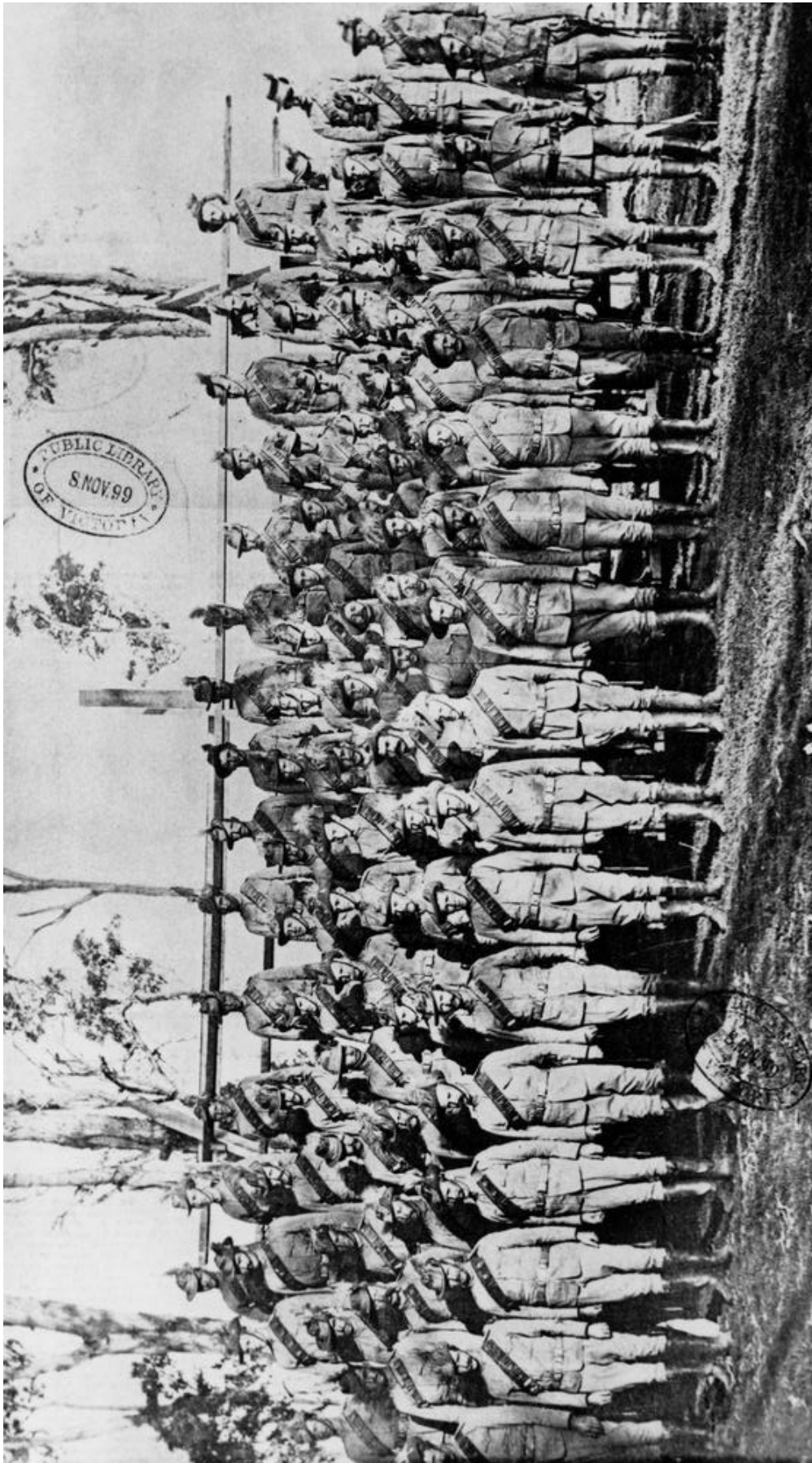
The reverses sustained by the British troops in South Africa in November aroused throughout the Empire spontaneous feelings of loyalty, patriotism, and military ardour, which took practical form in Australia by the proposal to send a second contingent to the battlefield. The Queensland Government at once offered, subject to the approval of Parliament, to send another 125 mounted infantry fully equipped, to the battlefield. This proposal met with hearty response in Parliament, the Assembly carrying the motion unanimously, and with cheers for the Queen, on December 20, and the Council doing likewise on the following day. Numbers of men in all parts of the country volunteered, and the contingent embarked on board the s.s. "Maori King" on January 14 amid great popular enthusiasm.



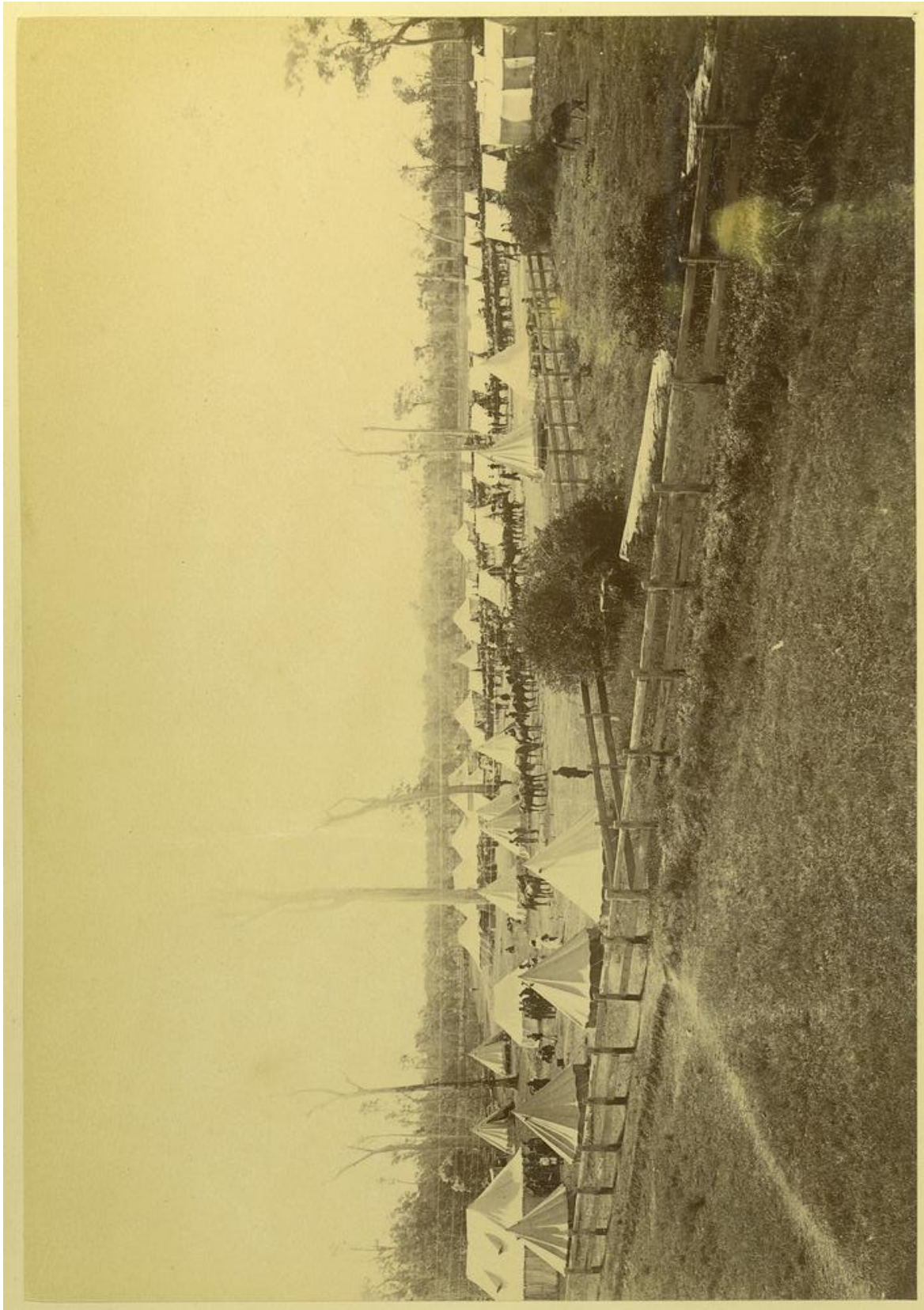
Brisbane Courier 'War Map' from 13 January 1900



'A' Company, 1st Queensland Contingent, at Meeandah, 1899.



'B' Company, 1st Queensland Contingent, at Meeandah, 1899



Meeandah Camp, 1899



Horse lines, Meendah, 1899

3.2 History of the Camps

3.2.1 Meeandah Camp

1st Contingent at Meeandah, 20 October 1899 to 1 November 1899.

Mr John Cameron, chairman of the directors of the Queensland Meat Export and Agency Company, (sometimes referred to as the Eagle Farm Meat Export Company) offered the Queensland Government free use of the paddock which adjoined the Meeandah railway station, and the use of their facilities for the storage of military equipment.¹² Lieutenant-Colonels Ricardo, Aytoun and Thomson, and other subordinates inspected the ten-acre paddock *with a view of forming an encampment for the mobilisation of the Queensland contingent of troops for the Transvaal*.¹³ Lieutenant Colonel Thomson, the Principal Medical Officer, made a close inspection to see that the site was healthy and that the sanitary facilities were suitable, and found it to be an excellent site. Town water was laid on to the paddock and a number of water troughs were also available for horses. The location of the camp so close to the railway line was also considered most suitable as it allowed ease of access for military and visitors alike. The Government rapidly accepted the QME&A Company's offer, and Headquarters Staff, Queensland Defence Force drew up the plans for the camp.

As early as 10 October, the Staff Officer Mounted Infantry had requested the assistance of A Battery to furnish a party to layout the Meeandah camp. This was done under the supervision of Lieutenants C H Black and C B B White¹⁴ [later Sir Cyril White, Chief of General Staff, Australian Military Forces] both of the Queensland Regiment Royal Australian Artillery (QRRAA.)

The use of the QMEA land as a mobilisation camp made good sense, as it placed the whole training area within very close proximity to the Government's deep-water Pinkenba wharf. It was from here that the contingent would depart on the Federal line steamer *Cornwall*. The *Cornwall*, a vessel of 5490 tons and 420 feet, was offered to the Queensland Government by Birt & Co Limited, to carry the troops and horses direct to the Cape. The ship was fitted out to Imperial requirements for the transport of men and horses.

The formal announcement of the Contingent's format was announced on Wednesday, 18 October. Applicants initially had to be members of the Queensland Defence Force (QDF), with preference given to those men trained as mounted infantry, drivers of field artillery, and to those accustomed to the care of horses. The Contingent, which contained not only the two Mounted Infantry companies offered earlier, but also a Machine Gun section from the QRRAA. The Commanding Officer of the contingent was announced as Lieutenant-Colonel Percy Ricardo of the Queensland Mounted Infantry (QMI), who dropped a rank level to enrol in the contingent. The two company officers were Captain H Chauvel [later General Sir Henry Chauvel] commanding A Company, and Captain P.W.G. Pinnock commanding B Company.

Volunteers were asked to enrol at Victoria Barracks, between 10am and 12pm, from 20 October onwards. QDF members required recommendations from their commanding officers, while ex-QDF members were to present their discharge papers. The government would purchase any uniforms or equipment in their possession. Horses suitable for sale to the government as remounts were also to be brought to Victoria barracks from 23 October onwards.

¹² Brisbane Courier, 10 October 1899

¹³ The Week, 13 October 1899

¹⁴ *ibid*

Friday, 20 October 1899

The Machine Gun Section of the QRRAA, being a detachment of the Permanent military, was the first to arrive at Meeandah, on Friday 20 October. A representative from the *Telegraph* newspaper also visited Meeandah mobilisation camp on the same day. *The arrangements are very complete. There are 25 men in camp and 60 tents have been erected. Most of these are of the mountain battery style, and eight men will be accommodated in each. A number of bell tents have been put up for the accommodation of the officers. The article also provided the following curious statement. The camp is beautiful for situation, and the symmetrical arrangement of the tents imparts a picturesque aspect*¹⁵.

Sunday, 22 October 1899

By Sunday evening Meeandah contained 160 men, including 28 who had arrived from Bundaberg and Rockhampton. Lieutenant-Colonel Thomson, the Principal Medical Officer, had already rejected 10 men as medically unfit. 120 troops from the QMI had already volunteered, and the training of those men who had not previously drilled as Mounted Infantry was deferred until they arrived in South Africa. Horses had also arrived at the camp, including 50-60 purchased from the Police Department. In addition, a number of civilians visited the Meeandah camp on Sunday afternoon.

Monday, 23 October 1899

A civilian Entertainment Committee was formed in Brisbane on 23 October, with Mayor Seal as its chairman. The committee decided it would entertain the officers and men of the contingent with a dinner and concert at the Exhibition Building, following the planned Review of troops in the Domain on Saturday afternoon 28 October. Calls went out for public donations to this cause.

A minor controversy that began with Reverend J.M. Bayles' letter to the *Brisbane Courier* on 23 October, arose around word that the departure of the troops was scheduled for Sunday the 29th, the day following the Review. Bayles believed that such an event was unsuitable for the Sabbath, but as it transpired, the rumour was unfounded and no Sunday departure had ever been planned.

Volunteers for the contingent continued to apply from all parts of Queensland, including two men from Sandgate of the North Pine Company of the Moreton Mounted Infantry, who were described as *good horsemen, wiry, and accustomed to the bush*.¹⁶ Similar accolades applied to eleven men from E Company QMI, Gatton, *all good Bushmen, good horsemen, and good shots*.¹⁷ Volunteers from Mackay also departed for Meeandah, and although members of Brisbane's Army Medical Corps volunteered for service, their offer was not accepted until January 1901! The *Brisbane Courier* somewhat naively suggested that stretcher-bearers were unlikely to be required in the 1st Contingent. Captain J E Dods, of the QDF Army Medical Corps did join the troops on sea journey to South Africa as their on-board medical officer.

On Monday evening there were 172 men and 109 horses at Meeandah, including nine volunteers who had come from Ipswich that day. Another 25 men were expected to leave Gympie by train on the following day.

Another controversy came to public notice when 100 tons of compressed fodder had reached Pinkenba from Melbourne. In response to charges of favouring Victorian suppliers over local Queensland sources for fodder, the Queensland Government denied ordering the product. The Minister for Agriculture, Mr Chataway, added that the military had not ordered it either. The

¹⁵ *Telegraph*, 21 October 1899

¹⁶ *Brisbane Courier*, 23 October 1899

¹⁷ *ibid*

suppliers, Rich and Co Limited, claimed however that the order had originated from the Brigade Office.

Tuesday, 24 October 1899

Meanwhile the mobilisation camp at Meeandah had continued to grow, with 227 men and 198 horses recorded on Tuesday evening. The day had been occupied with drill and physical training, including a Maxim gun drill by the 18 men of the QRRAA machine gun section. PMO Thomson had noted that the Darling Downs, Gympie and North Pine men *were a splendid lot*,¹⁸ but of the 17 Rockhampton men, 3 had been rejected for defective vision. The Mackay and Townsville men had yet to arrive, but three of the light transport wagons that had been ordered for use by the contingent had been delivered.

Wednesday, 25 October 1899

The Premier faced awkward questions in the Legislative Assembly on this matter on Wednesday. When asked for the name of the officer who had ordered the fodder, the Premier admitted that it had been Lieutenant-Colonel Ricardo. This led to Opposition accusations that the colony would have to pay for an order made by a military officer, supposedly (according to previous government statements that no order had been authorised) acting beyond the powers granted to him. Mr Keogh of the Opposition argued that Ricardo should not be allowed to purchase hay in the Southern colonies, and that a man who went so far beyond his duties should not be sent to South Africa with the troops. In the end, Premier Dickson fudged over the question of whether or not Ricardo's action had been authorised by government, probably because he was not prepared to sacrifice Ricardo as a scapegoat. No doubt Ricardo's enthusiasm, and perhaps a small amount of arrogance, had gotten away from him as he worked away to ensure the Contingent he wanted to command would be ready on time, whether or not the Government had found the time to actually vote funds for the expedition. No doubt Ricardo, who from time to time said what he thought of politicians, was little perturbed by the developments.

Premier Dickson also took the opportunity to announce the departure of the Contingent would probably take place on 30 October, depending on the arrival of the *Cornwall*, and that a public holiday would be declared for this date. It was also confirmed that on Saturday evening the Meeandah men would be entertained at the Exhibition Hall, with Premier Dickson, Mayor Seal, and Acting Governor S.W. Griffith to attend. Two hundred tickets at £2 2s each were made available for the banquet, with public admission to the gallery set at a half crown. The general public would be free to meet the contingent's members in the hall after the banquet. Brisbane's citizens were also invited by Mayor Seal to decorate their houses on Saturday, and the Railway Department announced that weekend excursion tickets to Pinkenba would be valid to Tuesday 31st.

The total complement at Meeandah on Wednesday night thus stood at 262 officers and men, including the 33 men from Townsville and Mackay who had arrived that day. The men were formerly allocated into their two Companies on Thursday, with 258 men sworn in by the end of the day. 251 horses were then in the horse lines. Another 10 wagons had also been delivered.

Thursday, 26 October 1899

By 26 October the *Brisbane Courier* was reassuring its readers that most of the supplies needed for the men while on the *Cornwall* would be from Queensland, not Sydney or Melbourne. The Agriculture Department had already purchased 35 tons of local fodder for the sea journey.

¹⁸ Brisbane Courier, 25 October 1899



Stereoscopic photograph of men of the 1st Contingent in camp.

Attributed to Elliott

Saturday 27 October 1899

On Saturday afternoon the Contingent marched into Brisbane where they were welcomed by one of the biggest crowds Brisbane had ever seen. The two mounted infantry companies and the machine gun section were preceded through Queen St by the Toowoomba mounted band. A small amount of moving film survives of the troops marching through the streets. The Queensland Department of Agriculture, which had established the world's first government department cinematography operation, was responsible for the footage. It is believed film was also taken of the Meeandah campsite, but there is no evidence it has survived.¹⁹ The men were then reviewed on the Domain behind Government House by the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Samuel Griffith, before ultimately moving off to the Exhibition grounds to ready for the public dinner.

Sunday, 27 October 1899

Sunday saw no examinations or training in the encampment. A united Protestant open-air service was held in a nearby paddock, attended by many more and small testaments donated by the YMCA were handed out to the men. After the service, a photograph session was held, with Tosca Studios taking a picture of each company, and the officers, for inclusion in the *Queenslander's* Contingent Supplement.

Monday 29 October 1899

The *Cornwall* had arrived at Pinkenba wharf on Monday morning, having been delayed by bad weather. As the twenty carpenters on board had become seasick during the trip from Sydney, the fitting-out of stalls and berths had not been completed. This delayed departure date was finally set as Wednesday 1st November, and that day was at last declared the much a-waited public holiday!

¹⁹ DEF/2, QSA

By Monday night the 11 officers and 250 men were ready for departure. Monday had been spent preparing for embarkation, and the Mayoress Mrs Seal, on behalf of the Ladies of Brisbane, had presented a large regimental flag to the contingent.

Thursday 30 October 1899

In Parliament on Tuesday morning, complaints were made that Lieutenant-Colonel Ricardo (in rather typical Ricardo fashion) had used intemperate language at Saturday night's banquet, claiming that lies had been told about him in the House, and that Opposition members "loafed" for their £6 per week. The issue was not pursued at that time. As an aside, the *Brisbane Courier* noted that the 100 tons of fodder ordered by the Brigade Office had been purchased by the government, to avoid litigation.²⁰

By the night of Tuesday 31st October, 194 horses had been loaded on the Cornwall despite continuing work on their stalls, and the remaining 110 were to be loaded Wednesday morning. The transport wagons had also been taken aboard. It was planned that Commandant Gunter would review the men at 1pm Wednesday, after which they would board, and the Cornwall would move out into the river to await the tide. Pinkenba wharf had been decorated on Tuesday with flags, garlands and banners, one bearing the motto "Hit Hard and Die Hard". Certainly, the intent was to drink hard at least, with some of the Meeandah men sneaking into town on Tuesday night.

Wednesday, 1 November 1899

The Meeandah camp itself was quiet on Wednesday morning, at least until the men who had been loading baggage at the wharf returned to camp. Civilians continued to arrive, and many drinks were shouted for the men at the canteen, courtesy of their friends and relatives. The canteen, supplied with beer by Perkins & Coy Ltd, had been introduced very early to the camp.²¹ Commandant Gunter reviewed the force at 2pm, in front of a crowd of 4000-5000 people. Laggards were hurried into position on the parade ground by Lieutenant Colonel Ricardo, who yelled that *there was nothing to be frightened of, as the Boers were not here yet.*²²

Approximately 25,000 public arrived to see off the 1st Contingent. People started assembling at Pinkenba wharf at 11am, arriving by train, road and water. 10,000 railway tickets to Pinkenba were issued at Roma, Central and Brunswick stations alone, and a total of 25 trains arrived at Pinkenba between 9am and 3pm. The public congregated at vantage points along the railway line and river banks, and refreshment booths operated next to Pinkenba station. When the troops arrived at the wharf *the level ground stretching away on either side of the wharf and extending back to the [railway] line was one huge sea of faces.*²³ Youngsters perched on any high spot, including railway carriages, sheds, and a loading derrick, and the river was alive with boats and steamers.

The Contingent arrived at Pinkenba wharf at 3pm, with the Machine Gun Section leading, followed by A and B Companies. A speech by Lieutenant Governor Griffith ensued, which included a message from the Queen, and various appeals to patriotism and upholding the honour of Queensland. The men then boarded ship, with the band playing "Soldiers of the Queen". At 4.30pm, the gangway was lowered, and the *Cornwall* left Pinkenba wharf for Sydney to the strains of "Auld Lang Syne". Shortly thereafter, a small boat was required to transport 5 men who had been left on guard duty at Meeandah, and who had arrived when the *Cornwall* was 50 yards from the wharf.

²⁰ Brisbane Courier, 1 November 1899

²¹ DEF/2, QSA

²² Brisbane Courier, 2 November 1899

²³ *ibid*

As the need for the encampment wound down and it was gradually dismantled the Under Secretary sent a formal letter of thanks to the QME Company in mid-November for use of the paddock.²⁴

Over the next couple of weeks, portraits of the men and officers, and shots of the camp, were hawked by J.J Hogg and Company, and Tosca Studios. The *Queenslander* offered an illustrated supplement of the departure, and Gordon and Gotch printed a 26-page souvenir booklet of photos and illustrations. (1s. 3d posted). Blackboro's official photographs were also circulating, and the Queensland Stereoscopic Company marketed a series of 30 photographs for use with stereoscopes.



²⁴ DEF/2, QSA



Meeandah camp from the railway line

Unknown



Horse line at Meeandah

Unknown



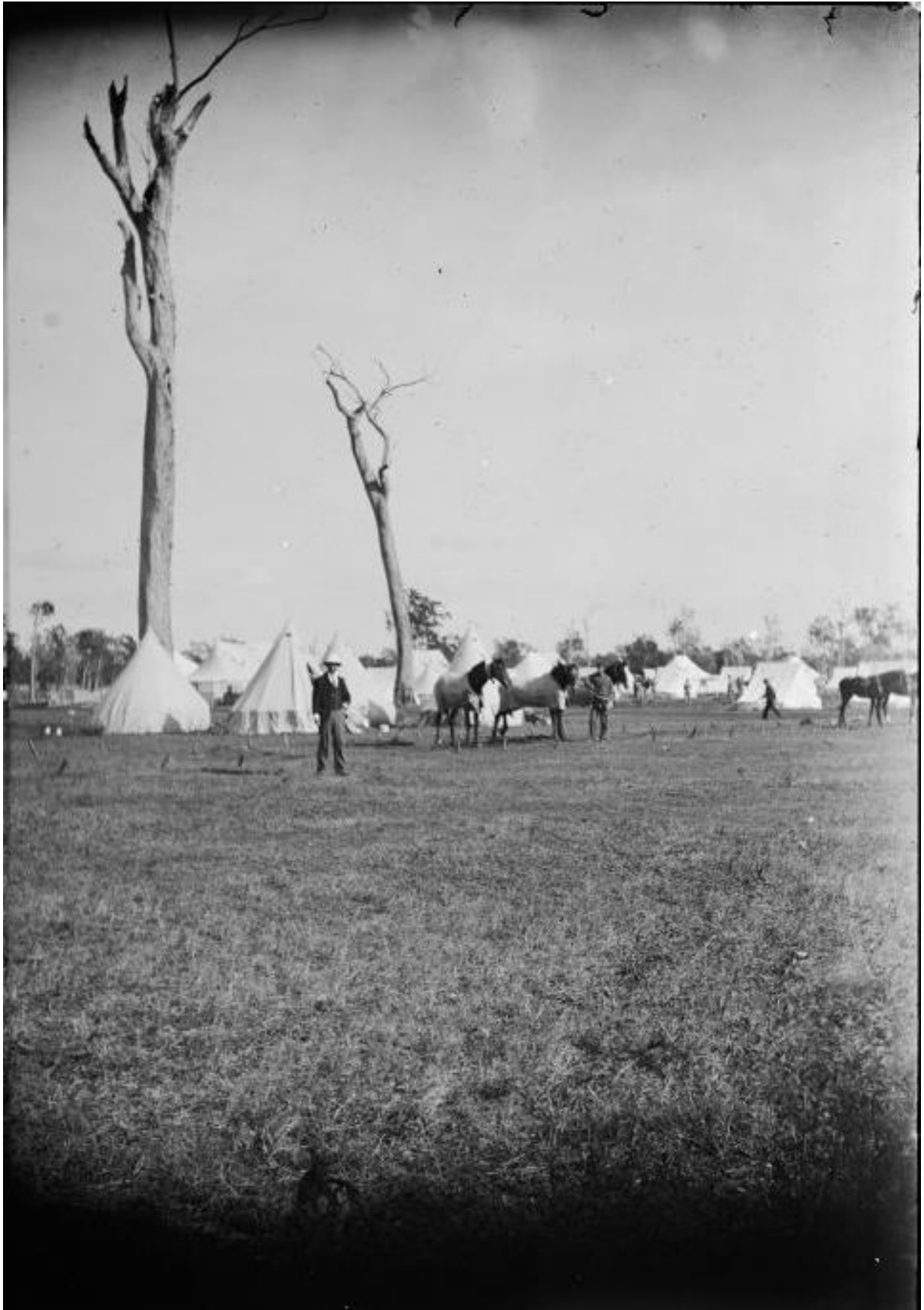
Meerandah camp, looking towards the railway line

Unknown



Meeandah, view of the camp.

Photo 101, Queensland Stereoscopic Company



Meeandah, a camp scene

Photo 102, Queensland Stereoscopic Company



Meeandah, horses going for morning exercise

Photo 103, Queensland Stereoscopic Company



Meeandah, how the horses are secured

Photo 107, Queensland Stereoscopic Company



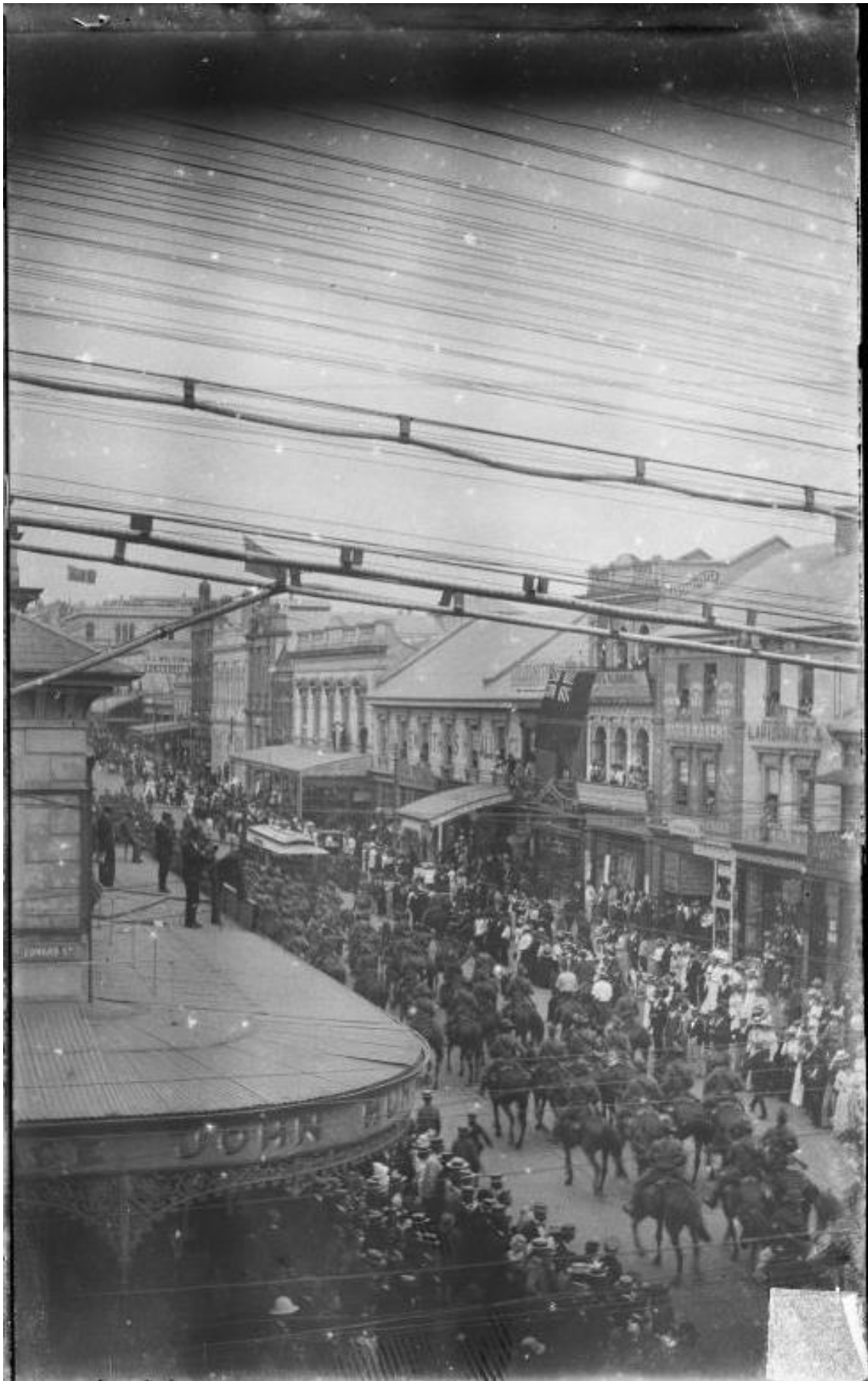
Meeandah, an express train at Meeandah Station, 1899

Photo 108, Queensland Stereoscopic Company



1st Contingent parade in Queen St, Brisbane

Elliott



1st Contingent on parade, Queen Street Brisbane

Unknown



Loading horses onto the 'Cornwall' at Pinkenba

SLQ

3.2.2 Pinkenba Camp

2nd Contingent at Pinkenba, 25th to 31st December 1899.

By mid-December the Premier was ready to ask Parliament to sanction 150 more men for despatch to South Africa. Things were going badly for the British in the war. The Boers had decimated the Imperial ranks at the battles of Stormberg, Magersfontein and Colenso, during the so-called “Black Week” of 10th to 15th December. As the wave of patriotism spread across the colony, offers of service began to re-appear.

Lieutenant-Colonel Thomson again proposed the formation of a 23-man Ambulance corps for South African duty, which could have been seen as a wise precaution given recent events, but his suggestion was again dismissed. 86 men in Rockhampton volunteered to serve in a second contingent, and others began to leave for Brisbane from such as Sandgate, Cunnamulla, Charters Towers, Stanthorpe and Cairns.²⁵

Despite the lack of government approval, Acting-Commandant Colonel JS Lyster consulted with Premier Dickson on 21 December on the subject of forming another mobilisation camp near Meeandah. Arrangements had already been made that the Queensland contingent could be transported aboard the steamer *Maori King*, to be supplied by New South Wales in January.



View of the camp from the Pinkenba Station-Master's yard

SLQ

²⁵ Brisbane Courier, 19 December 1899

Monday, 25 December 1899

By Monday 25 December, a new camp was ready to receive the men, having been laid out near Pinkenba Station by A Battery of the QRRAA. The camp was in a railway paddock immediately behind the Station Master's residence,²⁶ and at first glance the choice of site appears very practical, being walking distance from the Government wharf, and on vacant government land. The camp, for a contingent just a little more than half the size of the First Contingent, contained some marquees, 27 mounted battery tents in rows for the men, horse lines between the rows, and 13 bell tents for the officers, off to one side.²⁷

Although volunteers had been visiting Victoria Barracks and the camp on the 25th and 26th, enrolment and medical exams did not begin until the 27th. By Wednesday evening, 100 men had arrived. A number of horses were offered to the government by Mr Mc Eachern of Consuelo Station, Rockhampton, but after a police inspection they were declared unsuitable.²⁸ An urgent call went out for possible remounts to be taken to Victoria Barracks on the 28th.



At Pinkenba Camp before the rain set in

SLQ

Thursday, 28 December 1899

Twenty men were sent to a shooting test at Lytton on 28 December, 18 of whom passed, despite the bad weather. However, things were not going well at the encampment. Thanks to the rain, the men had to wade through ankle-deep water to get to their accommodation, and trenches and banks were built around the tents in response. The tarpaulin over the open cooking shed was in danger of collapsing under the weight of water, while the recreation tent, being used for medical exams, had

²⁶ Brisbane Courier, 25 December 1899

²⁷ Brisbane Courier, 29 December 1899

²⁸ Brisbane Courier, 27 December 1899

collapsed at least once during the afternoon. In the clothing tent, no clean shirts or dry clothing was available. Since the men were wet to the skin, overnight passes to the city were issued to those who wished to find a hot bath and a decent meal. Most accepted.²⁹

By the end of Thursday, 133 men had arrived to enrol. Of these, some were immediately rejected upon inspection by the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Hutchison, on the grounds of youth or obvious unfitness. The remainder were passed on to the formal medical exam, which was failed by 25% of the hopefuls.

Friday, 29 December 1899

Early Friday morning, 25 men from Cairns, Ravenswood, Townsville and Charters Towers arrived in Brisbane on the steamer *Barcoo*, and some grumbling ensued when they realised that no-one at Victoria Barracks had made arrangements for their breakfast. (Some of these men would later complain about not being paid for the time they spent travelling to Brisbane for enrolment.)

The weather improved sufficiently on Friday the 29th to allow for drilling of the volunteers at Pinkenba, one of whom was singled out as *a big, awkward bushman in a straw hat, evidently unaccustomed to the word of command, and slow in responding with the necessary movements*.³⁰ Testing of both rifles and men also continued at Lytton. By Friday night, 208 men had enrolled, and 148 had passed the medical examination, but no horses had arrived.

Saturday, 30 December 1899

Over the weekend things became intolerable at the camp. Saturday was quiet although some drill and riding tests occurred when 42 horses arrived. Of the 15 men from Allora inspected by Lieutenant-Colonel Hutchison, eight were rejected because of their youth.

After a visit to the camp by Premier Dickson and Acting-Commandant Lyster on Saturday, it was decided to move the water-sodden camp to the Exhibition Building the next day. This wise decision came however too late. On Saturday night the river invaded the camp. The elevated road which ran from Pinkenba station to the Meat Works, and which lay between the camp and the river, offered some protection, but the drainage pipes which were supposed to carry off water from the land side of the road were back-flooded by a very high tide. As a result, all the tents were in three to six inches of water, with the officer's tents faring the worst, being closest to the river. Lieutenant-Colonel Hutchinson's tent stood in one foot of water, and breakfast in the Officer's Mess was conducted with those present seated at the table with water up to their knees. As for the men, most spent the night standing miserably, waiting for daylight.

Sunday, 31 December 1899

At 8am, lorries arrived to evacuate the site, and they were loaded with salvaged equipment by 11am. What followed was, according to Captain Deacon, *A masterly retreat to Brisbane, the position being untenable, and the first manoeuvre of the contingent was brilliantly executed*. By 9pm Sunday, 3½ inches of rain had fallen in the previous 36 hours.³¹

²⁹ Brisbane Courier, 29 December 1899

³⁰ Brisbane Courier, 30 December 1899

³¹ Brisbane Courier, 1 January 1900

3.2.3 Exhibition Grounds, Brisbane

2nd Contingent at the Exhibition Grounds, 31 December 1899 to 13 January 1900

The men evacuated from the Pinkenba camp were taken by train to the Exhibition Hall, arriving by noon. The horses were taken by road to the Exhibition Grounds. Thus, a bunch of very soggy volunteers spent New Year's Eve camped on the floor of the Exhibition Building. Alas, *threats of putting the whole contingent on picket duty, and physical weariness, soon ended all attempts at extemporising New Year's festivities.*³²



Camp at the Exhibition Grounds

SLQ

Monday, 1 January 1900

On New Year's Day, recruitment resumed, with 8 out of 50 men failing the horsemanship test at the showground. A squad was sent to the Toowong firing range, and some new rifles had to be rejected because of sighting faults. Some thievery from the men's kit occurred the same day, which led to restricted public access to the Exhibition camp. 65 horses were now available, with more due to be viewed at Ipswich, and others were being sent from Mr De Burgh Persse's station, and from Beadesert.

On 3 January, the *Brisbane Courier* reported that a total of 450 men had volunteered thus far (including 231 civilians), with 264 being examined in camp. It also offered readers some statistics on the physique of 60 men chosen at random from the camp, which currently consisted of 220 officers and men. Average height: 5 ft 8½ inches. Average weight: 10 stone, 5 ½ pounds. Average chest: 37½ inches.

³² Brisbane Courier, 2 January 1900

The *Brisbane Courier* of 4 January reported that the swearing in of the men was to begin that day, and that it proved *the thoroughness of the work that has been done under the difficulties caused by the vile weather, and by the shifting of the camp. This, of course, does not mean the contingent has been completed, or that every man sworn in will necessarily be among the final selections.*

While the use of the Exhibition Grounds had been welcomed by the military hierarchy the *Brisbane Courier* reported that was not necessarily the feeling of the troops. *The men and officers strongly express the feeling that they would rather be in camp under canvas, but are grateful for the kindness shown in giving them secure shelter from Pinkenba mud flats.*³³

Selection and training of the volunteers of the 2nd Contingent continued until the afternoon of 13 January when the men were embarked on a train from the Exhibition platform and transported to Pinkenba station. Upon disembarking the men were formed up in marching order and preceded by the Headquarters Band and the Volunteer Band and Pipers, marched to their old camping ground, which were still described as 'swampy'. The men paraded for an address by the QDF Commanding Officer, Colonel J Sanderson Lyster, and then were marched to the government wharf and embarked on the *Maori King*.

3rd Contingent at the Exhibition Grounds, January 1900 to February 1900

Quite a number of men who were not taken on the strength of the 2nd Contingent remained in the military camp at the Exhibition grounds, and many were taken strength of the 3rd (Queensland Mounted Infantry) Contingent which was established in February 1900. The 3rd Contingent remained at the Exhibition grounds until its departure in March 1900.

4th Contingent at the Exhibition Grounds, February 1900 to 28 March 1900

The 4th Contingent (Queensland Imperial Bushman), though officially not established until 20 April 1900, began training at the Exhibition grounds immediately on the departure of the 3rd Contingent. By 28 March the *Brisbane Courier* was reporting that arrangements for the removal of the camp from the Exhibition to Lytton was occurring, and that all tents had already been set up in preparation. Within a few days the entire camp was moved to the slopes of Signal Hill at Lytton. The rationale behind the move was that the Exhibition Grounds were too small for the number of horses proposed to be acquired for the contingent.

3.2.4 Signal Hill, Lytton

4th Contingent

The traditional site for military training encampments for the Queensland Defence Force, Signal Hill provided all the necessary space for what was thought would be a series of contingents larger than those previously despatched.



³³ *Brisbane Courier*, 6 January 1900

3.3 Locating Meeandah Camp

The location of the initial training camp appears not to have been printed as an official map by the Government at the time. This is probably because the land on which it was set up was privately owned by the Queensland Meat & Export Agency Co, and 'loaned' to the Government. The plans made by the military officers charged with laying out the encampment have not been located in any archival repository.

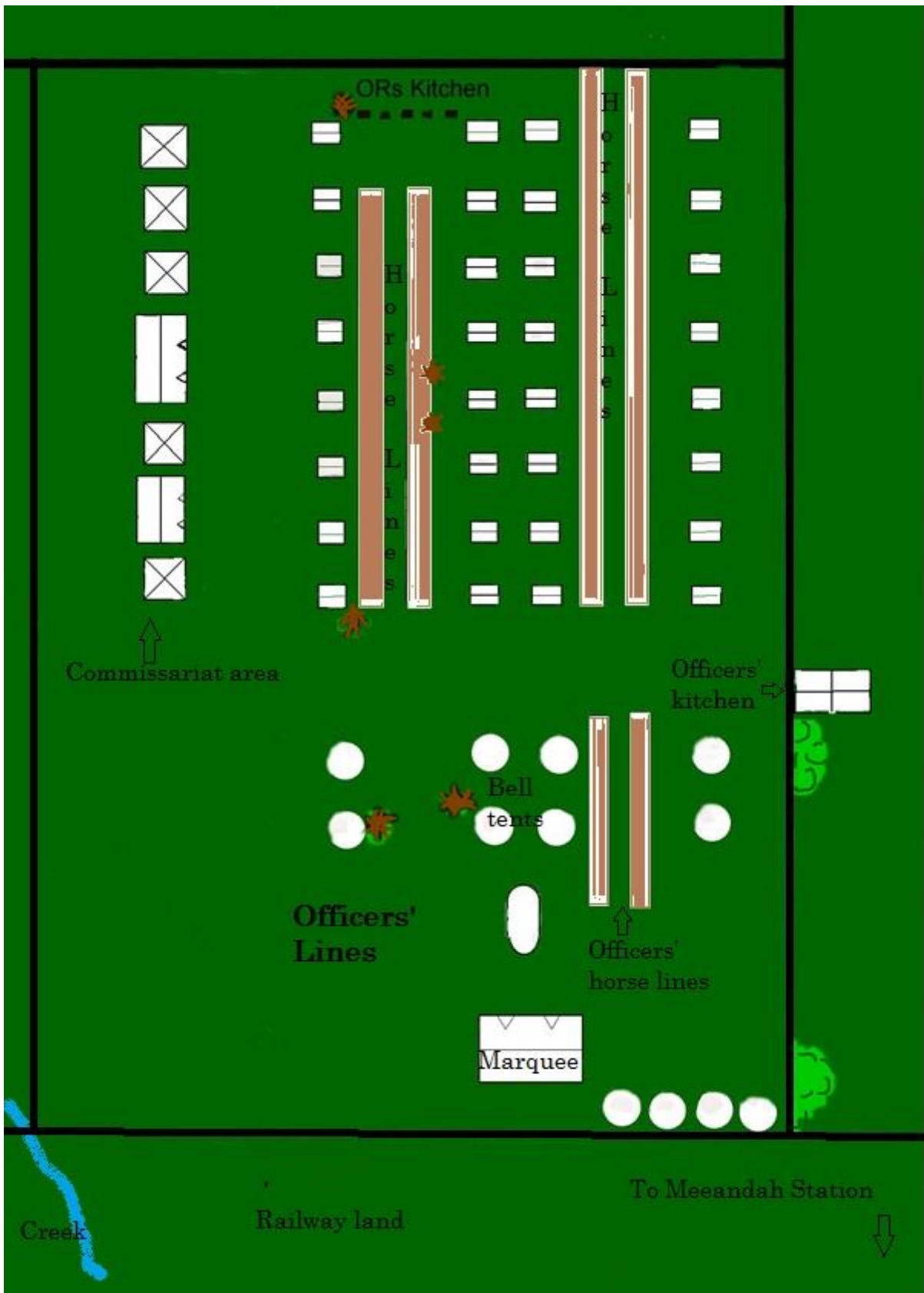
The QM&EA Company owned considerable property in the Meeandah/Pinkenba area, associated with its meatworks, so it was not possible, by ownership alone, to identify which of their paddocks was used. The site was also low, flat and generally featureless, and the few distinctive trees that appear in early photographs are long gone.

Newspaper reports indicated the camp was situated on the left-hand side of the railway line on the way to Pinkenba, just outside Meeandah station. It was described as a compact camp, and given the small number of men trained there, it was considerably smaller than many of the other military encampments held annually in Brisbane. The account given in *the Brisbane Courier* of 28 October 1899 is the most descriptive:

The men are accommodated in four rows of tents, two rows being allotted to each company, and these face one another, so that the two centre rows are back to back. Between these two rows the horses belonging to each company are picketed head and heel, as they were at the last camp. In this way the men have their horses directly under their supervision, and can attend to them in a case of night stampede – a thing not unlikely to happen with the lot of young horses at present in camp. Between the men's lines and the railway fence are the officers' quarters, the favourite habitation being a Q.D.F. bell tent, while a big marquee serves the purpose of a mess tent and a reading-room. The cooking for men and officers is carried on at different ends of the camp, and the officers' chargers are picketed near their quarters. On the western side of the camp is a row of tents of all shapes and sizes given over to the storing of different parts of the commissariat – saddles, clothing, &c. – an office, and sergeant's mess. Altogether the camp presents, under ordinary circumstances, a most soldierly appearance, and reflects great credit on the officers who planned and laid it out.

This description in particular has proved useful in interpreting the photographs that have survived of the original encampment. Based on newspaper and photographic records, and with reference to military encampment layout instructions, it has been possible to re-create the encampment layout, and its placement on the site. The actual size of the encampment layout also determined where it could possibly have been located in relation to the various Queensland Meat & Export Agency Co paddocks in the area.

The 19th century photographs, early maps, and a series of aerial photographs dating from the 1940s through to the 1980s, have also enable the encampment to be plotted onto the modern landscape. The mobilisation camp had a frontage of approximately 340 feet (103m) to the railway line, and was approximately 480 feet (146m) deep. It is located within property now (2003) owned by AMACA Pty Limited. Much of the former mobilisation site is currently used as a concrete pipe storage yard.



Reconstructed layout of the Meeandah encampment



Google maps location of former Meeandah Mobilisation Camp in 2003



View towards site from the old Meeandah Station, 2003.





View towards site from the old Meeandah Station, 2003.



3.4 Locating Pinkenba Camp

No maps survive of the Pinkenba encampment. Newspaper reports indicate it was to the rear of the Station Master's residence at Pinkenba. Photographic evidence confirms this.



Google map location of Pinkenba camp



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